

**Savannah City Government
SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES
MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
WORK SESSION
January 24, 2013 – 10:00 am**

PRESENT: Mayor Edna B. Jackson, Presiding
Alderman Van R. Johnson, II Mayor Pro-tem
Aldermen Tony Thomas, Chairman of Council
Alderman Mary Osborne, Vice-Chairman of Council
Aldermen John Hall, Carol Bell, Tom Bordeaux and Estella Shabazz

Acting City Manager Stephanie S. Cutter
City Attorney W. Brooks Stillwell

ABSENT: Alderman Mary Ellen Sprague (Out of town).

Mayor Jackson called the meeting to order.

Park and Tree Commission's 2013 Priorities

Walt Harper, Chairman of the Park and Tree Commission gave a presentation on their priorities for 2013. He first introduced Commission members Catherine Varnedoe, Cornelia Hartridge, Audrey Platt, Paul Hammond, and Dr. Rebecca Gatson-Dawson. He said the Commission met in September 2012, decided to compile some priorities and emailed them to City Council seeking their support in this endeavor. One major concern for both the Commission and Council is the Victory Drive corridor and stated that a committee has been created to study this issue.

Mr. Harper said that all utility providers, such as Georgia Power have been encouraged to seriously consider underground options for utility repairs and upgrades in the historic squares and neighborhood parks. Oglethorpe, Lafayette and Calhoun Squares are currently due for an upgrade as overhead utilities run through all three (3) squares and need to be relocated underground. Jerry Femming, Director of Park and Tree has met with Georgia Power to discuss options and resolutions for this issue. There is also the matter of actively discouraging unauthorized destruction of the urban forest. Mr. Harper stated he has discussed this with other Council members, specifically with Alderman Thomas, and says the trees in the downtown area are taken care of as they are on City property, but trees in other areas like the Southside suffer greatly. When Park and Tree officials are out issuing citations it takes them away from their other duties, so they would like to have one Code Enforcement officer dedicated to Park and Tree.

Mayor Jackson then opened up the discussion for questions. Alderman Thomas commented on the great job done on the squares, applauded their work and hopes they maintain through St. Patrick's Day. He stated he does have a problem with replacing 150 year old trees with ornamental crate myrtles and says the method of taking down trees is definitely a major issue. He also wants the tree ordinance fast-tracked, and said that they should look at best practices in other cities and caucus it to get recommendations for Council. He also wants Park and Tree to expand their scope for a more cooperative alliance with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GA DOT) to ensure that projects and roadwork in our communities are better landscaped.

Alderman Osborne acknowledged the email from Park and Tree and responded stating how great their work was, but also wants more focus on other squares in the city and not just the downtown area. She was concerned with plantings on Victory Drive stating the area needs more trees and water because the area is so blighted. Mr. Harper stated this is an area of concern to them as well. Alderman Bordeaux said he was very interested in this issue, particularly in laying underground lines and asked Mr. Harper if he had any idea what the cost would be for this endeavor. He stated that Mr. Flemming had met with Georgia Power and was told it would be too expensive. Mr. Harper acknowledged the dollar amount, but feels in the long run it would be cost-effective.

Alderman Bordeaux also inquired about the status of tree canopies and wondered if they were losing ground. Mr. Harper deferred the question to Bill Haas, Forest Administrator with Park and Tree, who stated because of previous budgetary cutbacks their focus is on maintaining existing trees. Alderman Bordeaux asked how many trees does the City lose each year and what type of trees are used as replacements. Mr. Haas said there is a loss of 600-700 trees per year citywide; they use a variety but try to utilize canopy trees except in areas where they are prohibited. Alderman Bordeaux then asked what type of budget is needed to maintain the trees annually and that this data be provided to Council. Mr. Haas stated he would get that information to each Council member. Alderman Hall asked what type of canopy trees did they use, and Mr. Haas stated they use certain live oaks and a variety of elms. Alderman Hall also asked about the advantage in using crate myrtles as a replacement and Mr. Haas stated they are very sturdy and can tolerate harsh conditions.

Alderman Shabazz thanked him for the report and update and said her concern was various issues on Victory Drive that include the granite curbing by Hopkins, a park with dim lighting by the Presbyterian Church and the median on Montgomery Crossroads leading to Abercorn. Alderman Johnson also thanked Park and Tree for all their assistance and stated the focus is definitely on forestry issues. Alderman Osborne asked for clarification on 300-400 replanted trees versus the loss of 600-700 trees and said that is not a good ratio. She would like to see a report that includes requirements, a policy statement, and says the City should put their money where their mouth is. Alderman Thomas stated that he wants to ensure that the live oaks are saved during Phase 5 of the Truman work. Mayor Jackson congratulated the organizations that maintain the squares and says the City should collaborate more with them. She agreed with Alderman Shabazz on the Victory Drive issues, stated that she also has issues with DOT and asked Joe Shearouse for his comments about the entrances into the communities. He stated that DOT has only been somewhat cooperative, but they have no regulatory power over Georgia Power or DOT. Mayor Jackson stated that this is one of the areas that will be discussed at the legislative breakfast meeting in Atlanta. Alderman Hall asked if there was any way to discourage foot traffic in the medians and Mr. Shearouse said it is difficult to stop jaywalkers. Mayor Jackson inquired about the irrigation trucks and their schedule and also stated she would like mature azalea bushes in the medians in the spring and flower beds during the winter.

Arena Update

Marty Johnston, Director of Special Projects, provided an update on the new arena project, acknowledged committee members, and briefly described next steps. She gave an overview of the committee goals, presented the scope of work for a feasibility study, described the selection of a firm to conduct the arena study, explained recommendations for the best site, and outlined the operational plan and the financial plan. She also discussed the existing Civic Center arena and the issues and challenges that persist in the current structure. She described other sites that were visited by some committee members which included the Bi-Lo Center in Greenville, SC, Gwinnet Center in Duluth, GA and Veterans Memorial Arena in Jacksonville, FL. She said

everyone was extremely impressed with Gwinnet Center in Duluth and stated that it is a premier arena and is considered the cream of the crop. She then reviewed next steps starting with a site study RFP and said a draft will be ready in the first 2-3 weeks of February. She also described the proposed sites which consist of the existing Civic Center, Savannah River Landing, Springfield Canal and Martin Luther King and Fahm. Alderman Osborne asked if the sites had been vetted for each step, and who would be conducting the study. Ms. Johnston stated that each site had been vetted and that each has their own set of pros and cons. The study will also look at ingress and egress to ensure the viability of entrances and exits.

Alderman Shabazz inquired about the voting of funds in 2006-2007 and asked if there was also a specific site in mind. Mayor Jackson asked the older Council members for assistance with this response. Alderman Thomas said the funding was for a police station along with a multi-purpose site for the arena, and that they were seeking money for federal enforcement funds and grant money to aid the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). The original amount was \$90 million which former city manager Mike Brown said would not be sufficient and why they sought the additional funding. Alderman Osborne then asked if the property was purchased with SPLOST money and what property does the City own or not own. Ms. Johnston said the city owns most of the existing Civic Center and part of Springfield Canal, but does not own any portions of Savannah River Landing or MLK and Fahm. Mayor Jackson and Alderman Thomas both responded that the land acquisitions were purchased with SPLOST money as well as other properties. Alderman Shabazz asked why there was a need for an RFP for the sites, and Acting City Manager, Stephanie Cutter stated that the City needs to conduct a thorough study to determine which site is the most feasible for construction. She also said the residents had reservations about the Springfield site, but Alderman Shabazz said they are now on board with it. Alderman Osborne agreed that the residents did approve of Springfield, but Mayor Jackson said the City didn't perform due diligence on this site.

There was further discussion from Alderman Osborne on this issue and Alderman Bordeaux asked if there was a problem with using SPLOST money for other things, and if it had to be repaid. Ms. Johnston stated that the money can be used for other things and asked Dick Evans, Director of Finance for clarification. He said he would have to check on the issue of repayment. Alderman Thomas asked for a copy of the original arena feasibility study, the expense of visiting each site, the cost of the RFP and if it takes into consideration size. Ms. Johnston agreed to provide each item. Alderman Bell suggested including neighborhood association representatives in this decision-making process. Mayor Jackson agreed and said they should attend their next scheduled monthly meeting and asked Ms. Cutter to place Council on their agenda.

Tourism Advisory Committee's Purpose, Tourism Update and Recommendations

Bridget Lidy, Tourism Services Administrator presented an update on the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC), their purpose and recommendations for Council. She briefly described TAC's purpose, components of downtown Savannah, and reviewed tourism's impact on the county. She described the existing service levels, the current state of affairs, 2012 TAC accomplishments, preservation fees, and current restrictions. Alderman Osborne asked if an audit had been conducted on tourist fees, and Ms. Lidy stated that Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Chair of TAC, would cover that topic next as well as recommendations. She then introduced Ms. Walker who first thanked Council, Ms. Lidy and introduced the TAC members present. She then discussed the topic of double-decker buses and explained why they unanimously recommended that Council support the existing ordinance. Next, she gave an overview on the TAC process and the framework for TAC recommendations. She described how TAC protects historic assets, protects resident's quality of life, supports the local tourism industry, provides the best possible experience for visitors, and builds alliances with various civic organizations such as

the Downtown Neighborhood Association, Historic Savannah Foundation, Tourism Leadership Council and Visit Savannah. She described TAC's 9 recommendations which are 1) a 6 month moratorium on new tour companies, 2) enhancing tour services, 3) enforcement, 4) capping system for regulation purposes, 5) modify restrictions, 6) preservation fees, 7) walking tours, 8) education and communication, and 9) ordinance changes.

Mayor Jackson thanked Ms. Walker and the entire committee and acknowledged their hard work and progress. She then opened up the discussion for questions. Alderman Osborne suggested that TAC use cameras to monitor the tour companies or at least think about it. Ms. Walker said they explored using cameras but found they are very intrusive and expensive. Alderman Bell suggested utilizing downtown City staff to call in violators. Ms. Lidy informed Council that the tour companies are open 7 days a week and their hours range from 8 am to sometimes after midnight so having staff on the street is essential and critical when TAC is not there. Mayor Jackson commented on the misinformation that she has heard from some of the tour companies, and inquired if the tour guides took some type of exam. A TAC member stated that there is an exam that all tour guides take, but they do not give them an historical script that they have to memorize. Mayor Jackson again thanked Ms. Lidy, Ms. Walker and the TAC members for their great work.

Council reconvened after a short break to discuss the recent upsurge in crime in Savannah and Alderman Thomas expressed his concern about the 3 shootings on the Southside. Alderman Osborne thought it was commendable that Mayor Jackson and Ms. Cutter both went to the Southside after the shootings, knows she can't be present after each incident, but feels this could potentially open Mayor Jackson up to criticism from the community. Mayor Jackson stated that she does try to go to as many as possible, but realizes that she can't be everywhere. Alderman Hall and Alderman Johnson also applauded both, but were concerned that Mayor Jackson might spread herself too thin. Alderman Shabazz acknowledged that Chief Lovett was not asked to attend this meeting, and noted that some areas of the City get more attention from the media than others. Alderman Bordeaux said he appreciated everyone's hard work regardless of the area.

Executive Session

Upon a motion by Alderman Johnson seconded by Alderman Hall and unanimously carried, the Council voted to amend the agenda to include litigation.

Upon a motion by Alderman Johnson, seconded by Alderman Osborne and unanimously carried, approval was given to go into Executive Session to discuss litigation.

Upon a motion by Alderman Johnson seconded by Alderman Osborne and unanimously carried, approval was given to come out of Executive Session where no votes were taken.

Council broke for lunch

Acting City Manager Stephanie Cutter presented the City Manager's Briefing of the agenda items for the Council Meeting of January 24, 2013. The agenda is attached and made a part of the permanent record.

Mayor Jackson adjourned this meeting.



Dyanne C. Reese, MMC, Clerk of Council